



## UDOT unveils changes to I-15 CORE project

Michael Rigert - Daily Herald | Posted: Friday, May 7, 2010 12:20 am

**LEHI** -- Last-minute design changes to the Interstate 15 reconstruction project announced Thursday aren't just improvements to the overall project, they also bode well for motorists and pedestrians.

UDOT Executive Director John Njord said a new design approach is being used for phase one work on the S-curve between the University Parkway and Provo Center Street exits that eliminates the need for lane closures. All three existing lanes of southbound travel will remain open during the 150-day phase to bring the curve up to federal highway standards. Those safety changes include flattening out the curves, widening shoulders and adding high-arc freeway lighting.

UDOT officials had previously anticipated daytime closures of one lane through the S-curve that may have resulted in one- to two-hour traffic delays during peak travel times and up to five or six hours on holidays.

"The good news is there will be a minimum impact to travelers as they travel through the lanes," Njord said.

To accomplish this design, lanes and shoulders will be narrowed, speed limits reduced and lane shifts will take place. Work has already begun on the southbound side of the S-curve, and commuters will begin to see lane shifts over the next two to three weeks, said Heather Barnum, I-15 CORE spokeswoman.

But barring a 20 percent reduction in traffic volumes through the Provo S-curve during peak travel times and summer holidays, motorists can still expect estimated delays of 30 to 60 minutes during high-volume periods, Barnum said.

Njord unveiled another addition to I-15 reconstruction that will likely receive rave reviews from Utah Valley University, adding that his daughter attends UVU. In coordination with Orem and school officials, Njord introduced a pedestrian underpass to be constructed under University Parkway and near the intersection with Sandhill Road, the main entrance to UVU.

Dal Hawks, UDOT I-15 project director, said the three entities had initially looked at the concept of an overpass. But city and university leaders expressed concerns that students and cyclists would be less likely to use an overpass. The underpass, he said, not only provides greater safety to pedestrians and cyclists, but it also facilitates a smoother transition of traffic flow through the interchange that will add new lanes as part of the reconstruction.

"Construction of a pedestrian underpass would be a tremendous asset for UVU," said UVU associate vice president of facilities Jim Michaelis. "Right now, many of our students have to make their way to campus by walking across an extremely busy intersection."

News of the pedestrian underpass was welcomed by Orem Mayor Jerry Washburn. He said the city had worked hand-in-hand with UDOT officials to arrive at a solution that would be good both for pedestrians and cyclists and also for traffic moving through the busy interchange. The at-grade underpass will be attractive to anyone looking to cross the parkway, Washburn said.

"This is a huge improvement. It demonstrates UDOT's willingness to work with local concerns and requests, and we're very appreciative," he said.

Construction on the underpass is anticipated to begin sometime next year, Barnum said.

The most extensive of the three design changes -- announced Wednesday night at the Provo Municipal Council meeting -- is a redesign of the Provo Center Street interchange, adapting an initial rotary design to a more familiar modified diamond hybrid model. In addition to increasing capacity and efficiency of traffic through the interchange, it fulfills a request of Provo officials to extend greater access to properties near Draper Road on the freeway's west side that the city has pegged for future development.

On Wednesday, Provo Mayor John Curtis called the new design for the Provo Center Street interchange "fabulous."

He said it not only works around the unique topography challenges presented by the railroad and other infrastructure complexities near Center Street, but also gives greater access to the city's west side while being able to move a larger volume of traffic.

Work on the Provo Center Street interchange is slated for this summer, Barnum said.

- For information on I-15 CORE traffic changes, alternate routes and construction schedules, visit [udot.utah.gov/i15core](http://udot.utah.gov/i15core).